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**EXETER HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 141  
EXETER, ME 04435-0141**

**NEWSLETTER  
MARCH-APRIL 2003  
VOL. 4, NO. 2**

**MEMBERSHIP FEES:  
SINGLE - \$8 / FAMILY - \$12  
DUE OCT.1ST ANNUALLY  
TEL. 285-7903 OR 379-2449**

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Hope you have all been keeping warm this winter. It sure has been awfully cold. At least it will start warming up in the next month or so.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!** We will be publishing a country recipe book late this spring, but we need your recipes to fill it. Please send us your favorite country recipes, along with your name and town. Send them to the address at the top of this newsletter. We only need 75 recipes, so if we get more, we will not be able to use them all. Availability date and price will be announced later.

The historical society will be attending the Southern Piscataquis Chamber of Commerce Business Expo to be held in April at the Piscataquis Community High School in Guilford. Several area historical societies were asked to display an "Expo From The Past" exhibit where each society would exhibit a business from their town 100 years ago. We will have a full display of the Exeter Fair and

Raceway. The Expo will be held from 5-8 PM on Friday, April 4th, and 9 AM-3 PM on Saturday, April 5th.

Our calendar and placemat sales have been very successful. We still have both available for sale, as well as postcards, and notecard sets. We are already planning calendars for 2004. We also discussed having souvenir blankets (lap throws) made. The next meeting of the Mid Maine Association of Historical Societies will be held on Sunday, March 30th, at 2 PM, at the Dover Historical Society in the former Observer building. Election of Officers for 2003 will take place at this meeting.

Our spring rummage and bake sale will tentatively take place on June 1st at the Masonic Hall.

The society has provided the town with an old photo for the cover of the town report, and a short history of the photo will appear on the inside front cover. Also on the inside front cover will be a brief history of Exeter from 1792-1802, and then events that happened in 1803...200 years ago. They plan on doing the same for each year up until 2011 when Exeter will be celebrating its 200th birthday.

New members: Doug and Carolyn Pike of Exeter.

## THE COLD YEAR

The years 1814 and 1815 were unusually cold, but the year 1816 was devastating. This has been forever known as "The Year Without a Summer".

January and February were unusually warm, and March was it's usual, cold and snowy, for the first two weeks, but then warmed up for the last two weeks. April started normally, but then grew colder as the month went on. May continued to be cold. Buds were frozen and fruit blighted from the frost and cold. The month of June was the coldest ever known. Corn was killed and replanted, only to be killed again. During the month frost and ice was common, up to one half inch thick. Nearly everything that was green died. Snow fell to the depth of seven inches in Maine and Vermont, and three inches in Massachusetts and New York. A cold wind blew almost continuously from the north. Women knitted extra wool mittens and socks for their children. Wood piles had to be replenished, and the men worked in the fields wearing thick coats and mittens. These conditions were present in the entire northeastern part of the United States and Canada. On May 29th and 30th snow fell to the depth of five inches. From June 6th to the 10th snow squalls occurred frequently and the the ground was frozen every morning. Frost occurred during every month of the summer. No corn survived in northern

New England. Rye and wheat crops ripened , but the yield was very small. Potatoes were also light in yield and they were unripe and watery.

A great number of birds were so benumbed that they could be readily caught in the hand, and many of them perished. All the bread that the families made was derived from pounded wheat and rye, mixed with potatoes.

It was at this time that many families of New England deserted or sold their farms and moved west to the Ohio Valley. This is known in history as the Ohio Fever.

When the spring of 1817 came, many families had little money to buy seed for their crops, as they had no crops the year before. Many Bangor businessmen were praised for their kindness in granting credit to the stricken families and allowing them to pay for their seed and supplies in the fall after their crops were harvested. The summer of 1817 brought abundant rains and warm weather, and the harvest of that fall was plentiful.

Also in the summer of 1817 there were great flocks of wild pigeons. They came in huge flocks, sometimes darkening the sky. They did some damage to the grain crops, but also provided settlers with a much esteemed article of food. It was not uncommon for the settlers to net forty to fifty dozen pigeons a day. By the end of the year everything was back to normal.

## CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

The news of finding gold in California did not reach the east coast until 1850 and 1851. We only know of one man from Exeter that went to the Pacific coast that early. His name was Elias T. Young, and he left with a company of men from New York, by sailing vessel by the way of the Isthmus of Panama. They landed at the mouth of the Chagres River, and there hired a native to row them up the river as far as possible. Then they had to walk the rest of the way, carrying their luggage on their backs, to the Pacific side. Another sailing ship took them to San Francisco, and they walked from there to their destination along the St. Mary's River, above the present day Sacramento. Young remained in California for eighteen months, and then returned to Exeter, settling down as a farmer in the northern part of the town. In the spring of 1856, a company of Exeter men left for the gold fields of California. This group of men consisted of: Edwin Call, Charles Palmer, George Chamberlain, Elias T. Young, Winthrop Chapman, Samuel Southard, Henry Tibbetts, and John Titcomb. They all eventually returned to Exeter, except for two. George Chamberlain permanently settled there, and John Titcomb, who had lost one arm in Exeter before he left, and then lost his life while trying to swim across the Sacramento River.

## TWO EGYPTIAN PLAGUES

The first was in 1870 when grasshoppers took over the land, ruining the field crops over a large area of the eastern United States and Maritime Canada. The winter before had been favorable for their development and the hot dry summer brought ideal conditions for the infestation. There was nothing that could be done but sit back and watch fields of crops vanish. One farmer, who usually cut 25-30 tons of hay, got only 5 tons of stalks of herdgrass from which the heads and leaves had been eaten. 1-1/2 acres of wheat failed to return the seed sown the spring before. Most of the grain was cut for fodder. Pastures became bare, and farmers had to ration their feed. The west side of buildings would be covered with hoppers on sunny afternoons, to the height of a mans head. One farmer benefitted very well from this plight. He owned a turkey farm, and the hoppers provided feed for the birds through the summer months.

The second plague was in 1875. Forest Tent Caterpillars completely defoliated the fruit trees and ruined the fruit crops throughout New England and New Brunswick. These caterpillars gathered at the bases of trees or large branches. Many were killed with paddles, or squashed while wearing gloves or mittens.